



Midlink Business Park continues redevelopment plans in Kalamazoo, adds hotel

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[Midlink Business Park](#) is moving ahead with its original plans to continue developing the massive former General Motors plant in Kalamazoo.

"2008 was a great year for sure for us," Midlink President David Smith said. "We've kind of secured occupancy and tenancy in the two big buildings, and we've got a lot of vacant land, so we've started to push a lot of emphasis over to the retail area."

The first step for that retail area will be in the hospitality market. Midlink has sites for two hotels and last year closed on one, the future home of a four-story, 95-unit [Candlewood Suites](#) hotel. Site work for the hotel began in mid-February, owner and developer Andy Patel said, and it may be operational as early as this fall.

Candlewood Suites is an extended-stay hotel, and Patel expects a diverse mix of leisure, family and corporate clients. He sees potential for the hotel market in the area.

"It's a little slow now, obviously, but I'm sure that once things turn a little, that area will pick up faster than any area along (Interstate) 94 because of the university in town, the traffic from I-94, and the work Midlink Business Park is doing to attract businesses there," he said.

In addition to construction for the hotel, Midlink has started construction on roads and infrastructure that will serve 16 acres of retail space.

Smith said park management had a whole range of options for that space -- from grocery stores to banking institutions to amenities that would serve the tenants and park employees, such as dry cleaning and day care -- but his team chose to focus their next efforts on food service.

"We felt like, if we could lead with hotels, then certainly a logical extension of the hotels being there would be food service," Smith said. "It's a pretty difficult time to be doing that, but it's a difficult time to be doing a lot of things, and we've figured out how to be successful so far doing this."

[Hackman Capital Partners](#) purchased the former GM plant in 1999. The 340-acre park now has 1.6 million square feet of flexible tenant space and 110 acres are designated as a tax-free Renaissance Zone through 2017.

Last year, Midlink completed three different deals, which brought them to more than 70 percent occupancy in the current buildings. One of those deals was Kaiser Aluminum's \$80 million billet-casting and extrusion facility. Construction on the more than 460,000-square-foot facility began in October.

Park management would like Midlink to house a range of businesses. Smith thinks other services will come to the park in the future, and he would love to see an athletic facility there eventually. But the retail portion of the park is still in the early stages.

"When this whole retail area gets done, you probably won't even be able to see the building in the background," he said.

One thing Smith and Midlink won't have to worry about, in Patel's opinion, is finding businesses to set up shop at the park. He said both park management and Comstock Township have been very easy to work with.

"From a developer's standpoint, that's very important -- how are the master developers and the township treating new businesses," he said. "I can tell you that they've been very helpful and eager to help anyone willing to come in and develop with them."

Another aspect of the redevelopment Smith is excited about is the changing perception of the area of town around I-94's Sprinkle Road exit, which includes Greenleaf Hospitality Group Inc.'s efforts with [Wings Stadium](#).

"Greenleaf is working on improving, cleaning up that part of the corner, and we're working on cleaning up and revitalizing our part of the corner," he said. "In a sense, through different means, we're improving the neighborhood, improving the intersection. And that benefits the whole town, for sure."

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